

Gingerbread

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Gingerbread

by [air_of_the_Waterfall](#)

Summary

Another winter brings Christmas cheer and plenty of candy, but Will accidentally hurts Little Hannibal's feelings and has to make it up to him.

It was rare for Hannibal and Will to venture off their property together, let alone into public spaces. The risk of recognition and capture always loomed like silhouetted pine trees in the night, but on nights like this, lit only by Christmas lights and the glow of snow blankets, where luxurious winter clothes could conveniently obscure their forms... it would have been a wasteful shame to lurk indoors, so they'd driven several hours northeast to Toronto for its famed annual winter market.

Hannibal's nose was pink with cold, and he wore a thick knitted scarf wound elegantly around his neck. When he thought no one was looking, he discreetly nuzzled into it with a deep breath, and Will knew it was because the plush wool smelled like home. As they strolled together through the market that burst with cocoa, peppermint, people, and snow, their gloved hands twined tighter together. Their eyes wandered over endless loops of lights, glittering tinsel garlands, and the colourful pom-poms of toques as strangers bustled about.

Will gestured to one such hat with his chin and donned his faithful "Please?" expression. Leaning in closer to his husband, he murmured, "You'd look cute in one of those."

Hannibal sniffed in mock affront, but he stifled a laugh. "I am not *cute*."

"Sure you are." Will took a sip of cocoa from the thermos they'd packed, its vapour fogging his glasses. "You look at everything around us like it's magic. I love that about you. See? Now you're blushing!"

Hannibal's cheekbones had turned even pinker, but he grinned and feigned an absent look at the shopping list he'd long since memorized.

"Tea, cinnamon, and holiday sweaters for the dogs," he recited. "Which shall we go in search of first?"

"Sweaters."

"Sometimes, I can indeed predict you, my love."

Will playfully nudged him with a shoulder and took a few steps ahead so Hannibal could let him pull him along, scanning the booths and tents that lined the glowing side streets. They strolled in tender silence for a few minutes, taking in the scene and people-watching. Hannibal abruptly stopped.

Will jolted with the change before turning to face him. "Find something?"

Hannibal most certainly had, but it was nothing on the list. He stood with wide, enchanted eyes and stared at a long booth lined with elaborate gingerbread houses. Children decorated them with sloppy icing and candy, competing for the chance to win the season's most popular toy.

"Will!" Hannibal turned to him with a little hop and a gasp. "Will, I want to make a candy house!"

Will glanced around the bustling street as a spike of anxiety took hold of him. It was deeply unlike Hannibal to make himself so vulnerable outside of an environment he could control. Anything could happen, and Will's first instinct was to protect him, get him home and safely hidden like precious artwork that would fade in the sun.

He lowered his voice and squeezed his hand tighter. "Sweetheart, I'm sorry, but you can't."

Hannibal pouted with a little furrow between his brows. "Why not?"

"Han, it... isn't safe to draw attention."

Will knew and adored Little Hannibal, but everyone around them would only see a grown man acting like a child.

Wasn't that what Christmas was for? To rediscover magic? For anything or anyone to steal that from Hannibal was at once a grave injustice. Will smothered the irrational impulse to kill every last person in the market, but that wasn't what made him feel like a monster. With deep breaths, he calmed himself and mentally scrambled into his caretaker role like he'd run all the way home to retrieve it.

"I think it's time for us to go now, sweetheart. Look how cold you're getting." He tried to gently touch Hannibal's face, only to have his hand swatted away.

"I don't want to go home. It's pretty here. I want to make a candy house."

"Han... we... probably had to book tickets for the contest ahead of time. It's too late now. I'm really sorry, but..."

"You're lying!" Hannibal whined. "They don't have tickets."

"How about we have a nice drive home, and you can have a nap and listen to some music. When we get home, I'll make you a bottle."

Hannibal's eyes welled up with tears and he looked at the toes of his boots, subtly turning side to side in place with his hands in his pockets. His voice became very small. "No. I j-just want to make a candy house."

"You can..." Will promised, and Hannibal lit up instantly, brighter than all the bedazzled trees and lanterns. "Hanni, we can do anything you want. We just have to do it at home."

Hannibal scowled again but only looked back at the ground.

As gently as he could, Will repeated, "Let's go, sweetheart."

Hannibal listened, but he didn't look up or stop pouting the entire walk back to the car. Will tried to point out things his little one might like to see, but he never got a response. He would have preferred a tantrum to this resigned disappointment. Thick guilt and grief clogged his chest like glue, and all he wanted to do was wrap Hannibal in a massive hug like the gift he was.

A few blocks from the car, they passed a drugstore with its windows lit up in fluorescents, and Will had an idea.

“Come on, honey, follow me,” he coaxed.

Hannibal trailed behind him into the store, limply holding his hand, and Will hurried to find a pacifier. The options available were too small—unlike his custom made ones—but they were better than nothing. Hannibal perked up a bit when he understood Will’s intention, and he wordlessly pointed to the light green one he wanted before they cashed out and left. Will opened it outside and held it to his lips, and Hannibal’s nose wrinkled adorably when he took it but he still didn’t smile. Will’s affectionate smile was genuine, but he had to force it to reach his eyes. He tucked Hannibal’s scarf up over the lower half of his face, securing the pacifier in place while effectively hiding it from prying eyes.

“Does that feel better?” Will asked.

Hannibal’s eyes returned to his feet, but the scarf twitched as he began to suckle. By now, he was looking sleepy from the walk and Will had no doubts he’d pass out in the car. He considered letting Hannibal nap and seeing if he’d resurface when he woke, but he never wanted to rush him out of a regressed state. It was best to get him home safe where they were prepared for anything.

The lights faded away behind them, and Hannibal tried to snuggle into the backseat but he didn’t have a blanket. Will’s heart held tight to his larynx the whole time, and when they finally arrived home, he carried Hannibal inside and whispered apologies into his winter-bitten ears and temples. He clumsily stepped out of his boots with significant help, then Will changed him into pajamas and practically buried him in blankets and stuffies in their bed.

“Goodnight, sweetheart,” Will soothed. “Do... you want a bottle?”

Hannibal’s complete refusal to interact was beginning to worry him, and sure enough the poor thing hid his face in a fluffy lamb and began to snuffle.

“Go away,” he announced.

“Hannibal... oh...”

“Go away, Will.”

Will closed the door, clamped a hand over his own mouth, and muffled his own heartbroken sobs. Fuck, this hadn’t been about a gingerbread house. Little Hannibal had offered himself into the world for the first time and Will reined him in, held him back. Rejected him.

He cried himself to sleep against the wall outside the room.

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The next morning, Will found Hannibal at the kitchen table with their breakfast of pancakes, fruit, and bacon prepared, knees crossed in languid repose with his morning reading. Tentatively, Will approached him and hugged his shoulders from behind.

“That smells delicious,” he offered.

Hannibal tipped his head aside to accept the kiss to his cheek.

“Thank you, Will. Sit, it’s getting cold.”

Will obeyed and took a mouthwatering bite. Hannibal didn’t look up, maintaining a perfect air of casual aloofness that was nearly believable.

“Hannibal, I…”

“You made the right choice, Will. Frankly, I don’t know what came over me. I’m grateful you prevented me from making a spectacle of myself and putting us at risk. Let’s both put the night behind us and move on, shall we? There is one more week until Christmas.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Hush.”

Will finished his meal in silence, but Hannibal remained apparently unbothered. This continued for several days, living in domestic comfort as they had before, but Will did not see Little Hannibal again and it itched at him. It wasn’t unusual for Hannibal to go several weeks without regressing, but as winter encroached he needed it more; Will worried what might be stirring behind this new mask, but just as he would never force him out of littlespace, he couldn’t push him into it either.

On the day before Christmas Eve, Will was fed up with the constant jitters and guilt that wormed around his feet, and he missed Hannibal. He was present, but only physically. God, Will had hurt him badly, but he’d make it right. After a few minutes of research, he saved a recipe to his phone and drove out into the snow. When he returned, he carried heavy paper bags and Hannibal’s composition on the harpsichord murmured about the house.

“Hannibal?”

“In the living room, darling.”

“Come here when you have a minute?”

The music continued for a few more minutes, before Hannibal allowed Will to hear his footsteps as he entered the kitchen. When he saw what Will had laid out, he paused and quickly smothered the glint in his eyes.

Will, determined to bring that glint back, smiled. “I thought… we could make gingerbread houses.” He held up a distinctive, vaguely human-shaped cookie cutter. “And cookies for good measure.”

Hannibal took a breath and tipped his head in thought, scanning the colourful heap of ingredients as he glided closer and rounded the counter.

“I suppose it is a Christmas tradition,” he finally said. “I’d be happy to partake if that’s what you’d like.”

His collected demeanour only discouraged Will slightly, but he handed Hannibal his favourite apron and they set to work mixing the dough in companionable silence. Festive classical music played on the stereo and the air grew pleasantly spiced, puffs of flour drifting like snow. Finally, it was time to measure and cut the shapes to construct their houses. Will had grown up using a rolling pizza slicer for the task, but Hannibal’s deft hands lightly managed a knife and perfect lines without smushing any dough.

“Show off,” Will teased.

Hannibal flicked him a grin without teeth, and they arranged their creations on pans for baking. When they tucked them into the oven, Hannibal studied its golden glow for a moment before he closed the door. His eyes drifted far away, and he plopped down onto the floor to sit cross-legged and watch the dough rise.

“Hannibal?”

“It smells very good,” came the wavering reply. His eyes were huge when he glanced up at Will and started gently rocking back and forth. “Can we decorate them?”

“Of course we can,” Will soothed, and he thought his own smile might dissolve him. He slowly sat down with his back to the oven door, facing Hannibal to get to his eye level.

“Honey, we can do whatever you want. I’d never break a promise to you.”

Hannibal held up his pinky finger and Will devotedly latched on with his own. With that, Hannibal seemed to brighten up.

“When will they be ready?”

“Twenty minutes.”

“I want to have them now.”

“Patience, sweetheart. Why don’t we go play while we wait?”

“No.”

“Okay.”

For a few minutes, they sat together on the tile, and Hannibal stared transfixed into the golden light. Finally, he looked at Will again, almost sheepish.

“Will?”

“Yes?”

“Can I have a bottle now?” The words blended into one another.

Will practically leapt to his feet across the kitchen. “Of course! Let’s get your energy up before we have more fun.”

He made one and warmed it up, Hannibal watching eagerly but with an abundance of caution, like with one wrong move he might startle. Will’s heart clenched, knowing his misstep at the market taught Little Hannibal such hesitation, to doubt his own wants and needs.

“Come over to the couch and let me take care of you,” Will coaxed.

Hannibal shook his head and scooted back, closer to the oven. “No. Here. Please.”

Will shrugged. “Okay.”

Once he sat back down against the oven with the bottle at his side, he opened his arms and beckoned Hannibal to join him. Hannibal squirmed for a moment, getting comfortable, then settled with his head perched on Will’s shoulder. Will held the bottle to his lips for him until he suckled with a quiet sigh, bright brown eyes fixed tentatively on Will’s adoring face. Eventually, his gaze drifted back to the oven, and he lightly traced his fingertips over the warm expanse of glass above Will’s elbow.

“Hannibal, I’m sorry,” Will whispered. “I just wanted to keep you safe. I wanted to keep you all to myself. Sometimes I wonder... if you need more than me, need a world I can’t give you.”

Hannibal blinked at him for a long minute, hair falling over his forehead as Will’s breathing lulled him up and down. Finally, he spoke, expression open in the way only his little self knew how to be.

“*You’re* my world,” he said, as if it were the simplest, most remarkable fact left undiscovered by humanity. Then, he stretched up to place a small, chaste kiss on Will’s damp cheek.

Will hugged him so tight he feared he’d break him, dry-sobbing in such relief that all five of their dogs rushed to sniff him in concern. Hannibal giggled as their wet noses prodded him too for good measure, and he petted them freely with no concern for his ironed suit pants.

When the oven beeped, shrill and insistent, Hannibal startled from his peace and Will had to take a moment to soothe him again.

“Honey, it’s almost time to put the houses together! Can you sit over there so you don’t get burned, please?”

Hannibal hopped up to stand, then hurried to sit expectantly at a bar stool, feet swinging as he watched Will don oven mitts and free the steaming cookies. Will managed to entertain him for ten more minutes while they cooled off, and then it was finally time for decorating.

Grinning, Hannibal reached for piping tubes of icing and began construction on his little house with steadfast focus and determination. They spent the rest of the afternoon covering the cookies in candy and icing, forming delicious little dioramas of neighbours with their chocolate pretzel fences. Hannibal invented a story about two gingerbread cookies who fell in

love and another who tried to keep them apart, then swiftly snapped an arm off the offending cookie and popped it in his mouth. Will laughed fondly at his triumphant smile and took the other arm when Hannibal offered it.

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